
Update on IFAD's approach to address the United Nations Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

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Action: The Executive Board is invited to review the update on IFAD's approach to address the United Nations Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.

Technical questions:

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I. Introduction

1. In response to the United Nations Secretary-General's strategy for a system-wide approach to strengthening prevention and response measures to combat sexual harassment (SH) and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in its operations and funded activities, the IFAD SH/SEA task force¹ is advancing on implementing initiatives that foster a culture of ethics and accountability, while putting victims at the centre and advocating for their rights.
2. Since April 2018, the SH/SEA task force has reported to the Executive Board at each of its sessions² on the implementation of IFAD's SH/SEA action plans. It also reports on the concrete measures being taken to align IFAD's approach with the Secretary-General's strategy, as described in the report entitled Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach,³ and with any subsequent recommendations identified as best practice.
3. Since the release of IFAD's Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SH/SEA policy) in 2018, IFAD has implemented its 2018–2019 and 2020–2021 SH/SEA action plans and is currently finalizing the implementation of the action plan approved for 2022–2023 (see annex).

II. Update on IFAD's approach to preventing and responding to SH and SEA

A. Prevention and response

4. In the second and third quarter of 2023 respectively, the Chief of the Ethics Office, and the Senior Ethics Officer took up their duties. In the third and fourth quarter, these recently appointed staff significantly contributed to implementing and completing the 2022–2023 SH/SEA action plan and the strategic design of the 2024–2025 SH/SEA action plan.
5. Further action has been taken to continue strengthening IFAD's policies, procedures, contracts, letters of appointment and training to embed a victim-centered approach and to enhance the accountability of staff, non-staff, vendors, borrowers, recipients and other third parties that participate in IFAD-managed activities or operations. Throughout 2023, the Ethics Office (ETH) has actively participated in drafting and negotiating legal agreements to ensure that all agreements to which IFAD is a party adhere to the highest ethical standards, and that specific provisions are included in all agreements to prevent and promptly respond to SH and SEA allegations.
6. In the third and fourth quarter 2023, paramount importance has been given to drafting a new Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. The revised policy will align IFAD with the definitions and principles of the UN System Model Policy on Sexual Harassment as well as with the recommended best practices of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations. To this end, ETH conducted a desk review of the most recent reports and a benchmarking exercise with United Nations system entities and international financial institutions (IFIs).
7. ETH continues to take all the necessary measures to ensure that IFAD staff and non-staff complete the mandatory online ETH courses on the Code of Conduct, anti-harassment awareness, which includes SH, and the training on preventing and

¹ Led by the Chief, ETH and composed of representatives of the Office of the General Counsel, Human Resources Division, Office of Audit and Oversight, Communications Division, Programme Management Department (PMD) and Corporate Services Department.

² See [EB 2018/123/R.39](#), [EB 2018/124/R.41](#), [EB 2018/125/R.14](#), [EB 2019/126/R.39](#), [EB 2019/127/R.42](#), [EB 2019/128/R.51](#), [EB 2020/129/R.5](#), [EB 2020/130/R.4](#), [EB 2020/131/R.2](#), [EB 2021/132/R.12](#), [EB 2021/133/R.17](#), [EB 2021/134/R.23](#), [EB 2022/135/R.14](#), [EB 2022/136/R.16](#), [EB 2022/137/R.15](#), [EB 2023/138/R.11](#), [EB 2023/OR/5](#).

³ A/71/818.

responding to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and the respective refresher courses.

8. As of October 2023, nearly 1,200 IFAD staff members and non-staff had completed the mandatory online SH/SEA training (a 97 per cent rate of completion) and the standalone module on SH in the workplace (either upon appointment or through the refresher programme). In addition, over 1,000 project staff in 20 countries have received classroom training on SH/SEA delivered by ETH.
9. ETH is continuing its efforts, with PMD's support, to reach staff in IFAD's offices and third parties/implementing partners by raising awareness and delivering live SH and SEA training at project start-up workshops. Relevant multilingual materials specifically developed for implementing partners and project staff (such as the [guide for borrowers/recipients of IFAD funding on the SH/SEA policy](#), the [No Excuse Card](#), and the [Code of Conduct for Project Parties](#)) are publicly disclosed and systematically distributed to all participants, either in electronic or in paper format, ahead of each of the presentations. This allows them to familiarize themselves with the content and actively participate in the Q&A session at the end of the presentations.
10. To ensure that prompt and effective action is taken on all SH and SEA cases, the need to strengthen IFAD's reporting channels was identified to encourage individuals to report even when the fear of retaliation is high. Hence, ETH recently launched two new forms on its [website](#) that allow individuals to submit anonymous allegations. The forms are available in [Spanish](#), [English](#), and [French](#).
11. Consistent with previous years, IFAD participated in the 2023 United Nations SEA survey conducted by the Office of the Special Coordinator on Improving the United Nations Response to SEA (OSCSEA). The survey was received by ETH on 3 July and was sent to approximately 320 IFAD staff in over 40 duty stations identified as high risk for SEA by the United Nations and where IFAD has country offices. The preliminary completion rate shared by OSCSEA showed an all-time high response rate for IFAD, with a completion rate of over 50 per cent achieved as a result of continuous engagement with country office staff throughout the survey. As per past practice, the survey results will be shared with the Executive Board as soon as they are available to IFAD.

III. Conclusion

12. Combatting SH/SEA is a long-term commitment that can be achieved only through adequate resourcing and significant collaboration with all stakeholders participating in IFAD's activities and operations.
13. ETH has been committed throughout 2023 to strengthening the partnership with the other Rome-based agencies, the United Nations SEA working group, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) task force on addressing SH and the IFI network in order to maintain and enhance standards to prevent and respond to SH/SEA.
14. Efforts to communicate IFAD's zero-tolerance stance and enhance a speak-up culture in IFAD are being intensified to prevent SH/SEA and ensure a safe working environment for all IFAD staff and other parties involved in IFAD's activities and operations.

2022–2023 action plan – IFAD's Policy to Preventing and Responding to Sexual Harassment (SH), Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022–2023)</i>
Strategic area I: Preventing SH and SEA			
Update IFAD policies/procedures/processes	Where appropriate, update relevant policies/procedures/training to embed references to SH/SEA and promote a victim-centred approach based on respect for the victim's dignity as well as principles such as confidentiality and required consent.	Ongoing	2023
SH and SEA training and awareness-raising	Monitor staff compliance with SH/SEA online training courses and roll out mandatory refresher training programme	Continuous	Continuous
	<p>Deploy SH/SEA training for implementing partners, project staff at project start-up workshops and/or other regional events completed and/or planned so far in 2022/2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 18 January, Mali (completed) • February 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 19 February, Nepal (completed) – 26 February, Pakistan (completed) – Uganda (event postponed waiting for new date) • March 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 8 March, Congo (completed) – 16 March, Sri Lanka (completed) – 17 March, Morocco (completed) – Chad (event postponed waiting for new date) – Honduras (event postponed waiting for new date) – Kenya (event postponed waiting for new date) – Mexico (event postponed waiting for new date) • April 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 1 April, Sri Lanka (completed) – 4 April, Gabon (completed) – 13 April, Tajikistan (completed) • May 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 17 May, Central African Republic (completed) – 24 May, Kenya (completed) • June/August 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 7 June, Argentina (completed) – 9 June, Lesotho (completed) – 14 June, Cambodia (completed) – 22 June, Côte d'Ivoire (completed) – 27 June, Maldives (completed) – 29 June, Cuba (completed) – 28 July, Rwanda (completed) – 4 August, Nigeria (completed) – 9 August, Angola (completed) – Kyrgyzstan (postponed waiting for a new date) • September 2022 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Brazil (postponed to 2023) – 28 September, Sri Lanka (completed) • October/December 2022 start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 12 October, India (completed) – 3 November, Zimbabwe (completed) 	Ongoing	Continuous

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022–2023)</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 7 December, Benin (completed) – 21 December, Somalia (completed) • January/April 2023 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 16 January, Viet Nam (completed) – 7 February, Côte d'Ivoire (completed) – 24 February, Cambodia (completed) – 14 March, Tajikistan (completed) – 28 March, Côte d'Ivoire (completed) – 28 March, Ethiopia (completed) – 29 March, Haiti (completed) – 29 March, Ecuador (completed) – 4 April, Ghana (completed) • May/September 2023 – start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 9 May, Mexico (completed) – 18 May, Brazil (completed) – 23 June, Democratic Republic of the Congo (completed) – 26 July, Türkiye (completed) – 2 August, Mali (completed) – 15 August, Nigeria (completed) – 28 August, Bhutan (completed) – 7 September, Lao People's Democratic Republic (completed) – 25 September, Kenya (completed) • October/December 2023 start-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 4 October, Ecuador (completed) – 17 October, Nigeria (completed) – 8 November, Bangladesh (scheduled) 		
Decentralization	Include refresher SH/SEA training as part of the decentralization process.	Continuous	Continuous
Revision of procedures on SH	Review SH procedures and align with the United Nations SH model policy as appropriate.	Ongoing	2023
Enterprise risk management	Contribute to corporate risk management on unsatisfactory conduct and misconduct-related risks, including SH and SEA, and contribute to the development of mitigation strategies.	Continuous	Continuous
SH/SEA communication	Production of a short video on IFAD's efforts to prevent and respond to SH/SEA.	Ongoing	2023
	Ongoing internal communications and updates on SH/SEA.	Continuous	Continuous
Management compact	Develop a compact for Directors and Senior Management on diversity, equity and inclusion, workplace culture and SH/SEA: reiterate the commitment made by Management to integrate the diversity and workplace culture principles and a work environment free of all forms of harassment and discrimination in all IFAD activities. Post the signed compact internally.	Ongoing	2023
Strategic area II: Responding to SH and SEA			
Reporting and complaint mechanisms	Review and further strengthen reporting and complaint mechanisms including at the IFAD Country Office (ICO) level.	Ongoing	2023
SH/SEA victim and affected persons support mechanisms	Identify with the support of SH/SEA focal points in-country mechanisms in place in various locations to provide assistance to SH/SEA victims and affected persons and explore collaboration with governments, United Nations entities and other stakeholders.	Ongoing	2023
Strategic area III: Mainstreaming IFAD no-tolerance for SH/SEA in its operations and funded activities			
SH/SEA focal point programme	Expansion of the SH/SEA focal point programme in all ICOs. Identify all focal points and alternates, ETH to develop and roll out a specific training to enable them to perform the SH/SEA focal point role. Asia and the Pacific (APR) – completed	Completed	2022

	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Planned actions (2022–2023)</i>
	Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) – completed Near East, North Africa and Europe (NEN) – completed East and Southern Africa (ESA) – completed West and Central Africa (WCA) – completed Additional session provided on 14 March 2022.		
	Manage SH/SEA focal point programme. Training newly designated SH/SEA focal points.	Continuous	Continuous
Project implementation manual (PIM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Revise the PIM to embed references to IFAD's no-tolerance policy on SH/SEA. - Propose a template code of conduct for implementing partners to be added in the PIM. 	Completed	2023
Strategic area IV: Coordination and cooperation			
Engagement with Ethics Network (United Nations and international financial institutions [IFIs]) and Rome based agencies (RBAs)	Participate in regular meetings of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations (United Nations and IFIs) and RBAs.	Continuous	Continuous
Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Team on Accountability and Inclusion	Participate in meetings of the Task Team on Accountability and Inclusion to discuss best practices in SEA awareness-raising and protection strategies for local beneficiary populations.	Continuous	Continuous
Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) SH task force/United Nations SEA working group	Participate in meetings of the CEB task force on addressing SH within the organizations of the United Nations system and meetings of the SEA working group.	Continuous	Continuous
Strengthen SH/SEA collaboration and linkages with stakeholders in the field	Liaise with stakeholders in field locations (the United Nations, IFIs, governments and others) for closer SH/SEA coordination, knowledge-sharing and collaboration (including resident coordinators and local SEA networks, as appropriate).	Continuous	Continuous
Innovation challenge	Participate in the United Nations system-wide innovation challenge in close cooperation with the World Food Programme Innovation Accelerator to identify and support tangible and implementable projects in the areas of leadership, culture and prevention of SH.	Completed	2023